

**STORYTELLING EVANGELISM AMONG CHINESE ORAL CULTURES**

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## ABSTRACT

In the past twenty years, millions of Chinese have come to embrace Christianity as their main belief. Yet, this amazing phenomenon of people turning to Christ is not happening in every part of China. I have been ministering among the Chinese for 15 years, and in recent years, I discovered that there are more than 250 people groups in which there are no Christians at all. These groups are classified as minorities in China. Furthermore, since most of them have very little education, oral practice is the predominant mode of communication among them.

Such awareness has prompted the urgency in my heart. Thus I began to research the method of evangelism among oral cultures in the world. To my surprise, there are missions organizations and missionaries already engaging in evangelizing these peoples using oral strategies such as drama, music and stories with notable success. Thus in 2005 I launched a pilot study among the Zhuang people, the largest minority group in China, using the storytelling approach for evangelism. The result was very encouraging. I believe that storytelling evangelism among Chinese oral cultures can be enhanced with training. This thesis project is my desire for this purpose. Through this I hope to draw others especially those who have burden for China minorities to appreciate and appropriate this oral strategy.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### Introduction

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, China has become the largest fertile land for evangelization in the world. Millions of Chinese have come to Christ over the past twenty years. Yet, this amazing phenomenon of people turning to God is not happening in every part of China, especially it has been absent from the minorities. According to *Operation World*,<sup>1</sup> the percentage of Chinese Christians is 7% of the huge population of 1,262,556,787 (in 2000), where there are more than 100 million people from over 450 distinct minorities. Among these minorities 109 have less than 1% of Christians, and more than 250 people groups have no Christians at all. For example, the Zhuang people, the largest minority group in China, has a population nearly 17 million, yet the number of Christians is less than 0.5% and 70% of the population has never heard of Jesus. Their annual death rate is 6.5% and at this rate every year 104,320 Zhuang die and go to hell without hearing about Jesus; therefore, there is an urgent need for developing an effective strategy to evangelize the Chinese minorities like Zhuang. Furthermore, since most of the Chinese minority groups have very little education, in fact, many of them are only at elementary level, oral practice is the predominant mode of communication among them.

Since the oral people receive messages in a way that is drastically different from the literate people, there is no wonder that the oral people miss what the

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Johnstone & Jason Mandryk, *Operation World* (Mountain View, CA: Great Commission Center International, 2003), 155.

literate preachers are presenting, as Lovejoy implies in “But I Did Such Good Exposition: Literate Preachers Confront Orality.”<sup>2</sup> This awareness has compelled many missions agencies such as The International Missions Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Campus Crusade for Christ, Wycliffe International and Trans World Radio to engage people and to share their experiences in reaching the oral people. These agencies have come to a consensus on the need of developing communication skills such as storytelling, drama, cultural adaptations of Scripture in song, memorization and recitation. In fact, the power of storytelling in evangelizing the unreached is well documented. A success story was presented in the Lausanne Committee: one missionary couple entered a Muslim West African village.<sup>3</sup> After they received permission from the village chief to live among the villagers in order to learn more about them, they also got permission to share God’s word in the village. Instead of mentioning Christianity, or/and discussing Islam, the missionary couple told them the Bible stories chronologically. During the next year 20 individuals became followers of Christ. Besides effectively evangelizing the unreached, the storytelling method was also used to equip the church leaders. As Lovejoy puts it:

We lay a firm foundation for faith by telling the biblical stories sequentially in chronological order. This procedure provides a firm foundation for salvation, Christian living, and church health. It progressively reveals God’s attributes. It discloses our need of salvation and how God provided it. This

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<sup>2</sup> Grant Lovejoy, “But I Did Such Good Exposition: Literate preachers Confront Orality,” *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 1, No. 1, (December 2001), 22-32.

<sup>3</sup> Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, “Making Disciples of Oral Learners,” Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 54 (Pattaya, Thailand: September 29 to October 5, 2004), 6.

more complete introduction to Christianity provides a context for interpreting every portion of the Bible.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, this thesis explores if an oral method such as storytelling can be instrumental in fulfilling the task of evangelism among the Chinese minorities. A preliminary pilot study was then conducted to ensure the validity of this evangelistic strategy.

In November 2005 and April, 2006 I held a two-week-training course each for five Zhuang lay pastors. During each session, I instructed how to narrate the Bible on the topic of death (see Appendix A), and I asked each student to emulate the same. After gaining competence in Bible storytelling, oral evangelism was practiced in each of their own villages for three months. Then, the results were assessed by conducting an interview and a review session in July, 2006.<sup>5</sup> For the assessment each participant filled out a questionnaire (see Appendix B), and summarized the final results into a table (see Appendix C). There were exciting and encouraging outcomes for the storytelling project. All five trained lay pastors have shown the ability of telling a whole series of Bible stories to their villagers.<sup>6</sup> The total hours for completing the project ranged from 15 to 25 hours,<sup>7</sup> and the age of the target audience was around 10 yrs. old to 65 yrs. old. Most of the audience was illiterate and has had some elementary education. All trainees expressed that the

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<sup>4</sup> Grant Lovejoy, “Chronological Bible Storying: Description, Rationale and Implications,” (Nairobi, Kenya: Non-Print Media Consultation, June 2000), 12.

<sup>5</sup> The session lasted two weeks for a total of 40 hours. Due to the security reason, the participants’ names were designated as Brothers V, W, X, Y, Z.

<sup>6</sup> This capability was also confirmed during the interview and review session.

<sup>7</sup> This may represent different days’ or weeks’ storytelling. For example, Brother V took 10 consecutive days to tell the stories to a group of three youngsters with total hours of 20.

storytelling was a favorable and effective method in evangelizing, despite some resistances they encountered during the storytelling. For the most part, they were able to lead their audiences to the Lord, while some of them had further opportunity to teach the Bible storytelling method. As a result, all five lay pastors were willing to practice continually the storytelling method for evangelizing and conducting discipleship in their villages. The project was remarkably successful among the Zhuang.

To sum up, since most unreached people groups in China are those who embrace orality as their main method of communication and learning, and oral communicators rarely process abstract or syllogistic propositions, they tend to only accept what is true based on their life experiences. In light of the preliminary success in reaching the Zhuang, an oral strategy such as storytelling can be a very effective method of evangelizing these unreached and least reached people groups. Thus, the research question of this thesis project is: How can such storytelling strategy that was implemented among the Zhuang be implemented in other Chinese minorities?

### **Project Thesis**

If indeed storytelling can be an effective means to reach people, why not let the greatest story ever told be delivered in the same way to the minorities who have not yet heard the story? Accordingly my project thesis is: Storytelling evangelism among Chinese oral cultures can be enhanced with training.

To support this thesis, in Chapter 2 a biblical/theological framework will be established for supporting the idea of storytelling as an effective method in reaching people.

In Chapter 3, I will provide a survey of literature on storytelling among oral people, and I will summarize the effects of storytelling and evangelism in the oral world.

Chapter 4 (Project Design) includes a training manual to be used for the selected minorities in China. A field test was conducted in summer 2007 for the training manual and the effectiveness of the training was subsequently evaluated in late fall, 2007.

Finally, the outcome of this project and future recommendations will be presented in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

After describing the problem and setting in Chapter 1, I now turn to the biblical/ theological framework for arguing the effect of storytelling and its use in evangelism among oral peoples. In this chapter I will provide a framework for this thesis from two considerations: story and evangelism. These are based on biblical evidence and/or theological foundation. The argument will proceed in three steps: first, storytelling in the Bible; second, storytelling in evangelism in the Bible; third, storytelling evangelism among oral people.

#### **Storytelling in the Bible**

The Bible is the revelation of God’s redemptive work for His creation, and two-thirds of the Bible is narrative, and this fact speaks implicitly about the value of the story in conveying information. As Arthurs quotes attorney David Gustafson, “People understand and remember stories. Stories have beginnings and endings; they have plots and conflict and resolution; that’s the way people like to (and habitually do) think about things.”<sup>8</sup> According to Fee and Stuart, Old Testament authors frequently used stories to depict a character or reveal a truth that is impressive to the hearers.<sup>9</sup> For example, when David sinned by committing adultery with Uriah’s wife and tried to cover up by having Uriah killed in the battlefield (II Samuel 11-12), God sent Nathan to confront David, and Nathan chose to tell a story to reveal David’s sin. He said:

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety: How to Recreate the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 64.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 89.

There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought....Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him....David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”<sup>10</sup>

The story was so convicting that when Nathan linked David with the wealthy man who stole from his poor neighbor, David immediately admitted his wrongdoing and said, “I have sinned against God.”

Thus, a story when told discretely by the storyteller can be a very powerful tool to reveal God and to prompt a response.

The use of storytelling in the New Testament is similar to the Old Testament. Many stories were told during the early church period for proclaiming Jesus Christ as savior. The messages behind the stories were so powerful that the hearers either embraced the idea that Jesus is the Messiah, and their lives were changed, or they rejected Him bluntly. In addition, the methods the evangelists often used include reciting the historical events of God’s calling and dealing with His people.

The testimony given by Martyr Stephen in front of the Sanhedrin is a classic example (Acts 7). He retold the stories chronologically from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon and finally to the Just One, Jesus, when he concluded:

You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed

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<sup>10</sup> 2 Samuel 12:1-5.

and murdered him—you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.<sup>11</sup>

At this point the conviction became so strong that hearers were furious and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

Other New Testament authors such as Paul, in Antioch of Pisidia, recounted the Old Testament stories of God’s saving works, starting from God’s powerfully delivering Israelites out of Egypt, and despite their repetitive rebellions, God showed His mercy by preparing the Savior for them... and in the end, despite the resistance from the Jewish authorities, many believed (Acts 13:16-41). On other occasions, the historical events were used to illuminate God’s sovereign nature as well as His eternal purpose for mankind. For example, Paul used the story of God’s promise to Abraham to elucidate God’s sovereign choice:

It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.” Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” Just as it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”<sup>12</sup>

In Galatians 4: 21-31, Paul again used the story of Abraham’s two sons to depict God’s saving grace versus His Law. The author of Hebrews even alluded to

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 7:51-53.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 9:6-13.

the stories of the ancient saints who exhibited faith,<sup>13</sup> after which the believers should take their model.

Furthermore, Jesus was the master of storytelling as his parables attracted a multitude of audience. Although some of his parables were full of enigma and mystery, Jesus skillfully used stories to confront his opponents and to reveal the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to believers. After Jesus had finished telling the parable of the two sons and the parable of the tenants, the response of his opponents was, “When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.”<sup>14</sup> These parables were effective because the hearers identified with the figures in the stories, as aptly described by Wilder:

Perhaps the special character of the stories in the New Testament lies in the fact that they are not told for themselves, that they are not only about other people, but that they are always about us. They locate us in the very midst of the great story and plot of all time and space, and therefore relate us to the great dramatist and storyteller, God himself... This question of identification arises with every story we read, whether folk-story, epic, or modern novel. We identify with the hero or the villain, in their actions or in their fortunes.<sup>15</sup>

Achtemeier also agrees with Wilder’s observation:

Stories have the character of allowing us to enter into them. We identify with the figures in them and find them telling the story of our lives. And this is one of the functions of the stories in the Bible – they let us enter into

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<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 11:1-40.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 21:28-45

<sup>15</sup> Amos Wilder, *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 65.

their events, to experience and feel what has happened, so that the story becomes our story and the happening an event in our situation.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, this dynamic of hearers' identification with character(s) is one of the two results of the impact of biblical stories. As Long puts it, "The Bible gives us stories of faith and courage, and characters worthy of emulation. The parable of the Good Samaritan and some of the stories in the Book of Daniel are among the biblical narratives that work in this fashion."<sup>17</sup> Another impact of biblical stories according to Long is, "Making a claim concerning the nature of life, a claim about which the reader must make a decision."<sup>18</sup>

Storytelling has another important appealing feature: disarming the multitudes. Jesus used this feature to attract people and led his audience from their common problems in their common life to new belief and changed behavior. Lewis and Lewis describe this as follows:

Jesus scratched where the ordinary listener itched. He cited daily incidents, personal experiences, and common events to grab their attention and maintain their involvement. He stopped the common people in their tracks when He talked of temporal and eternal things. His story arrested them. Yet they were comfortable with His informal, narrative style.... When He pressures the people, He does it quietly, gently, via His stories.<sup>19</sup>

Miller makes the similar observation by stating:

Storytelling is powerful because it has the ability to touch human beings at the most personal level. While facts are viewed from the lens of a

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<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 15.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 76.

<sup>18</sup> Long, 74.

<sup>19</sup> Ralph L. Lewis & Gregg Lewis, *Learning to Preach like Jesus* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1989), 85.

microscope, stories are viewed from the lens of the soul. Stories address us on every level. They speak to the mind, the body, the emotions, the spirit, and the will. In a story a person can identify with situations he or she has never been in. The individual's imagination is unlocked to dream what was previously unimaginable.<sup>20</sup>

He then concludes:

The story is no longer simply heard, but also experienced. With this experiential immersion, the "Hearer" can listen on several levels and receive what's communicated in a form that disarms any fears of conquest. Experience by nature has a collaborative feel. It engages more of our senses and gets individuals involved in the story.<sup>21</sup>

Arthurs agrees: "Stories often carry their assertions and imperatives through the back door of the listener's mind.... The 'action' of argument causes people to push back. The 'action' of story causes people to lean in."<sup>22</sup>

In summary, God knew what he was doing when He chose story to reveal Himself to us. The effect of storytelling is so well attested by the concurrence of biblical scholars as well as the experience of common listeners, there is no wonder that "one of the most universal human impulses can be summed up in a familiar four-word plea: Tell me a story. The Bible constantly satisfied that demand."<sup>23</sup>

### **Storytelling Evangelism in the Bible**

Having established the effect of storytelling in the Bible, I will now turn to the use of storytelling in evangelism in the Bible. Since the Bible is the revelation of God's salvation plan to the mankind, and narrative is the predominant genre in

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Miller, *Experiential Storytelling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 33.

<sup>21</sup> Miller, 86.

<sup>22</sup> Arthurs, 87.

<sup>23</sup> Leland Ryken, *Word of Delight* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 35.

fulfilling this purpose, it seems natural to see storytelling evangelism is a common mode in the Bible.

Jesus himself frequently referred to Old Testament stories to reveal that he is the one for salvation. When two of his disciples were so distressed by his crucifixion, he appeared to them on the road to Emmaus. He opened their eyes by recounting the Old Testament stories about him, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”<sup>24</sup> Even though the text does not say he used stories to convince the two disciples, Jesus might have recounted the event in which Moses was instructed by God to prepare the Israelites for the Exodus. He then could have stressed the Passover meal to point to himself as the true Lamb of God to save the world. Jesus might also have mentioned the prophesies of many prophets concerning himself as Christ. It seems that the recounting of Old Testament stories was so convincing that the two disciples, after they recognized Jesus, asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”<sup>25</sup>

This episode of Jesus’ using God’s saving acts in the Old Testament to reveal himself as savior suggests evidence of storytelling evangelism in the Bible. As Greidanus puts it, “The Old Testament proclaims God’s mighty acts of redemption. These acts reach a climax in the New Testament when God sends his Son. Redemptive history is the mighty river that runs from the old covenant to the

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<sup>24</sup> Luke 24:27.

<sup>25</sup> Luke 24:32.

new and holds the two together.”<sup>26</sup> What then is the proper way to preach Christ? Donald G. Miller says it well, “In order to confront men with the crucial question of Christ, our preaching must center in the history of redemption. We do not confront men with Christ by preaching theological ideas, nor by ethical exhortation, but by rehearsing the saving events witnessed in Scripture.”<sup>27</sup> Jesus did it by telling these saving stories.

On another occasion, Jesus referred to Jonah’s story to reveal who he is, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.”<sup>28</sup> Here Jesus’ audience must have been familiar with Jonah’s story, so when Jesus recapped the event, they certainly understood Jesus’ warning against anyone who refused to accept his preaching. This is certainly an evangelistic message given to show God’s saving grace to the Gentiles (Jonah’s preaching to the Ninevites), and meanwhile to reveal the necessity of repentance of the Jewish as well.

The parable of the wedding banquet is also a story of an undeserved invitation extended to undeserving people to His kingdom: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to

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<sup>26</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 48.

<sup>27</sup> Donald G. Miller, “Biblical Theology and Preaching,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 11 (1958): 396.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 22:40-41; also Luke 11:30-32.

come. . . . So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.”<sup>29</sup>

Although we do not know how Jesus’ parables actually accomplish evangelism, they certainly achieved the purpose of revealing who he is. In fact, Jesus used parables so much and so often that the Apostle Matthew tells us, “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.’”<sup>30</sup> As Miller puts it well, “These parables were not good illustrations to punctuate his points. The stories themselves revealed the hidden mysteries of God.”<sup>31</sup> Jesus knew the effect of storytelling in creating people’s faith in God’s salvation.

Besides Jesus’ use of storytelling evangelism, there are other New Testament authors who used the same technique in preaching the gospel. The most notable ones again are Stephen’s bold speech recounting of Israel’s stories,<sup>32</sup> and Paul’s winsome proclamation of the gospel in Pisidian Antioch.<sup>33</sup> Although the former did not win any souls from his powerful evangelistic message, it did in fact plant seeds deep into the latter’s heart as Paul confessed later in Acts 22: 20, “And

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<sup>29</sup> Matthew 22:2-10; also Luke 14:16-24.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 13:34-35.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Miller, *Experiential Storytelling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 39.

<sup>32</sup> Acts 7:1-53.

<sup>33</sup> Acts 13:16-48.

when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.”

Thus, the use of the storytelling in evangelism was demonstrated by Jesus and the apostles to be an effective means of proclaiming gospel. However, in our day, we are not preaching the story often. Instead, the so-called “propositional preaching” is the common type of evangelistic sermon as Achtemeier says:

The gospel is framed in terms of propositions or truth: God is love; Jesus Christ died for our sins; we are washed by the blood of the Lamb. The good news is set forth in a series of propositions which are to be believed and intellectually accepted. The gospel remains an object “out there,” an external authority to be imposed on the congregation, and of course there is great attention to saying just the right words or accepting the right version of the scriptures as evidence of belief.<sup>34</sup>

She goes on to say:

The thoughtful preacher cannot help wondering why we take a Bible which is full of stories and turn it into propositions. Do the propositions capture the height and breadth and depth of all that is in the story? God is love, to be sure, the statement is there in 1 John. But do we not need the story to sense the manner of his love? Do we not need the pictures of the passion story in the Gospel According to John to fill out the proposition-the scene in the garden across the Kidron; Judas and those Pharisees coming out with their lanterns and torches and weapons; Peter sitting beside the charcoal fire while the questioning goes on before the high priest; the crow of the cock, the whip... the mockery... the thrust of the spear in the side, and Nicodemus in the night with his myrrh? Do not all those vivid scenes from the sacred history bring home to our hearts more tellingly what it means that God is love? And so should the story not be the content of our proclamation of that marvelous mercy?<sup>35</sup>

In summary, the power of storytelling in evangelism is evident in the Bible itself. Jesus was a storyteller. He knew how to capture his listeners’ hearts by using the narrative and parables and led them into His kingdom. Likewise, Jesus’

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<sup>34</sup> Achtemeier, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 14.

followers, as Lewis and Lewis put it, “They all had one thing in common: they all preached like Jesus. Maybe it’s time we did, too.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Storytelling Evangelism among the Oral People in the World**

After arguing for storytelling and storytelling evangelism in the Bible, finally I would like to argue for storytelling evangelism among the oral people.

First, I will define who oral people are, and how they process information transmitted to them. Then, I will establish why storytelling evangelism is an effective vehicle for proclaiming Gospel among the people in the world.

According to Lovejoy, the majority of people worldwide are oral communicators.<sup>37</sup> In simple terms, that means they learn exclusively or primarily by the spoken word, by listening and speaking. They use language in ways common to people who do not rely on print. Walter J. Ong in his major work on orality and literacy has identified three categories of oral communicators around the world.<sup>38</sup> First, primary oral communicators are those who live in a context in which literacy is not known or practiced. Second, residual oral communicators are those who have been exposed to literacy, even learned to read in school, but who retain a strong preference for learning by oral rather than literate means. Third, secondary oral communicators are ones who depend on electronic audio and visual communications. In a secondary oral culture, the elite are functionally literate, and they enable the rest of the oral communicators to acquire their information and

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<sup>36</sup> Lewis & Lewis, *Preach like Jesus*, 122.

<sup>37</sup> Lovejoy, “Chronological Bible Storying,” 4-5.

<sup>38</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982), 31-77; 135.

entertainment from electronic media. This last category comprises the industrialized countries, the so-called postmodern world. Therefore, the concern of orality involves not only third world countries but also the developed industrialized nations such as the U.S., and Canada.

Since oral communicators, whether primary, residual or secondary, are concrete-relational thinkers rather than abstract thinkers, they cannot easily process the information delivered by the expository modes of presentation. What I mean by “expository modes of presentation” is expressed by Postman as:

Exposition is a mode of thought, a method of learning, and a means of expression. Almost all the characteristics we associate with mature discourse were amplified by typography, which has the strongest possible bias toward exposition: a sophisticated ability to think conceptually, deductively, and sequentially; a high valuation of reason and order; an abhorrence of contradiction; a large capacity for detachment and objectivity; and a tolerance for delayed response.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, exposition depends on typography, literacy, and cognitive skills. Within a literate culture, exposition is natural, valuable, and reproducible. But in an oral world, expository modes of presentation are poorly understood and impossible to reproduce, as Lovejoy quotes Rick Brown to say:

Unfortunately it often happens that a print-oriented communicator wrongly expects that the oral communicators in his or her audience will understand logical, analytical, and abstract modes of reasoning, or he expects that programs designed for a print-oriented audience can be translated and used with an oral audience to equal effect. But, this is not usually the case.<sup>40</sup>

This conviction is also confirmed by Bryan Stone in *Faith and Film*:

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<sup>39</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Elisabeth Sifton Books, 1985), 63.

<sup>40</sup> Lovejoy, 6.

It would be no exaggeration to say that in recent centuries the printed word in theology has predominated over imagination, drama, myth, pictures, and storytelling. And yet few, if any, of our most fundamental Christian convictions can be reduced to words on a printed page. There remains in human beings a deep hunger for images, sound, pictures, music and myth.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, this hunger was suppressed during the age of modernity with its focus on propositional truth, but is finding its way to the surface again in our postmodern era. “Postmodernity is one of the most significant cultural changes in the past several centuries.” As Miller observed, “It describes a transitional time period in which our way of knowing and understanding our world has shifted, leading to significant changes in education and communication.”<sup>42</sup> Postmodern people are like primary oral people--they are people of reality. They crave experience, participation, interaction, and things that are tangible. For example, as Sample points out:

Oral People make a sharp distinction between theories about God and “actually knowing the Lord.” Their concern is not with their view of God but their relationship to God. They are interested, not in Christology, but in Christ; not in pneumatology, but in the Spirit. Conceptual thought about God “distances” oral people from God. It cuts them off from the power of God so essential to face the hard edges of a recalcitrant world that requires day-to-day struggle.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, orality leaves us no option but to communicate in the ways that the oral people can accept, understand, and interact with personal experience. Stories seem to be a wise choice of communication.

In fact, the early church was forged in an oral culture. People communicated mainly through oral forms. As discussed before, our Lord Jesus was a master of

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<sup>41</sup> Bryan P. Stone, *Faith and Film: Theological Themes at the Cinema* (St Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>42</sup> Miller, 13-14.

<sup>43</sup> Tex Sample, *Ministry in an Oral Culture-Living with Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, and Minnie Pearl* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 75.

storytelling. He did not seem to have written any of his messages. He committed his teachings to the memory of his disciples. Even Paul, as literate as he was, orally dictated many of his letters that were intended to be read in the churches.<sup>44</sup>

According to Bart D. Ehrman, “Literacy levels in the Roman Empire hovered at around 10 to 15 percent, and the literacy rate in the church was probably even lower. Paul’s letters to the churches he established were not read by them, but to them by one of their very few literate members.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, only a small portion of the early church was able to read Christian texts for themselves or to write them. Yet, the early church flourished as recorded in Acts 6:7, “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” Apparently this growth of Christianity was through the spread of the word of God orally. Paul confirms this: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”<sup>46</sup> Paul’s use of the language of “receiving” and “passing” with respect to teaching about the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23) and about the content of the gospel suggests strongly the oral transmission of the teaching. Also in 2 Timothy 2:2, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to religious men who will also be qualified to teach others.” We can assume that much of this teaching may have been in story form. In doing this the disciples of Jesus seem to be following His example.

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<sup>44</sup> For example, see Colossians 4:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:27.

<sup>45</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 10.

<sup>46</sup> Romans 10:17.

When Mark remarks on Jesus' teaching, "He taught them many things by parables," he is referring to Jesus' many storytelling approach of his teaching. This is affirmed by Mark's later comment, "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything."<sup>47</sup> From this passage, it seems that Jesus was not afraid to let the hearers wrestle with the meaning of his story. Indeed, he often answered his hearers with additional stories. Jesus knows that truth taught through the vehicle of story has a profound impact on the human mind by drawing people into the story, and this fact is aptly revealed by a Jewish teaching story:

Truth, naked and cold, had been turned away from every door in the village. Her nakedness frightened the people. When Parable found her, she was huddled in a corner, shivering and hungry. There, she dressed Truth in story, warmed her and sent her out again. Clothed in story, Truth knocked again at the villagers' doors and was readily welcomed into the people's houses. They invited her to eat at their table and warm herself by their fire.<sup>48</sup>

Since it is obvious that Jesus and his disciples used storytelling as a major communication tool in the first century oral world, we can also adopt the same form of communication in our twenty-first century, postmodern oral world. Unless we are still reluctant to admit that telling biblical stories is a powerful form of communication, we have to agree with Webber:

Postmodern theories of communication have shifted to the centrality of symbolic communication through an immersed participation in the event. This emphasis represents a shift from a print-oriented society to an audio-

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<sup>47</sup> See Mark 4:1-34.

<sup>48</sup> Miller, 29.

visual society. . . . Evangelicals will need to draw from the well of symbolic forms of communication.<sup>49</sup>

Stories are how oral communicators learn and share; they are filled with imagery, pictures, and symbols that are appealing to human nature. For the gospel to be preached in this hostile postmodern world, stories can be powerful communication tools because of their familiarity, simplicity and memorability. They also provide a way to get by hearer's defense. They are also less likely to provoke the rejection of the gospel message, as Wright insists:

Stories are, actually, peculiarly good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews. Where head-on attack would certainly fail, the parable hides the wisdom of the serpent behind the innocence of the dove, gaining entrance and favor which can then be used to change assumptions which the hearer would otherwise keep hidden away for safety.<sup>50</sup>

In summary, the effect of storytelling in an oral culture is well established by the example of our Lord and his disciples in the early church. The truth of God's word was delivered and accepted by this oral strategy. In the twenty-first century, not only in third world countries, but also in the postmodern world, oral communication is the predominant way of transmitting information. So why not let the God's overarching story of salvation be told in the same form of storytelling?

## **Conclusion**

The above argument provides the framework for this thesis project from two aspects: story and evangelism. From the interaction with the Scriptures and scholars' writings, I have come to the conclusion that the appropriateness of

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<sup>49</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for A Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 10.

<sup>50</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 40.

storytelling in the Bible is affirmed, the use of the storytelling evangelism is prevalent in the Bible, and the appropriateness of storytelling evangelism in the oral world is also demonstrated. The lessons learned from this project may also confirm the effect of this oral communication.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Now that the biblical/theological framework for the thesis is established in Chapter 2, I turn to the literature review concerning the issues of storytelling evangelism in an oral culture. I will conduct the research in two areas. The first section deals with the need of storytelling evangelism in Oral Culture. The second section will deal with the specific issues of preparing storytelling evangelism among Chinese minorities.

#### **The Need of Storytelling Evangelism in General**

The following literature review is based on the work carried out by the missionaries and missions organizations in world evangelism.

In “Chronological Bible Storying: Description, Rationale and Implications,” Lovejoy points out that the act of storytelling is an universal phenomenon. It is the primary way a vast majority of people have transmitted their culture. Thus Lovejoy specifically proposes Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) as an effective means of bringing people to genuine faith in Christ. He argues that CBS is not new. In fact, in Psalms 78,105 and 106, the Psalmists rehearse the story of Israel’s chronologically. Also in Nehemiah 9:5-37, the author traces the story of God’s work among Israel from Abraham until the return of remnants from exile. In the New Testament, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Stephen and Paul’s sermons recount God’s saving work in chronological order (Acts 7:2-53; 13:16-41). In Hebrews 11, the author also alludes to the events of those people of faith in chronological

sequence. Therefore, CBS is an evangelistic tool of telling these inspired biblical stories from Scripture.

Lovejoy's use of CBS evangelism is also preceded by numerous advocates of this approach. In his 1957 book, *The Communication of the Gospel to Illiterates*, Weber recalls his 1952 efforts in reaching the illiterates in what is today Indonesia by using stories and chalk drawings. Although he does not present a treatise regarding the use of chronological Bible storytelling per se, he formulates many fundamental principles for communicating the Gospel using this method.<sup>51</sup> This approach is also supported by Klem in *Oral Communication of the Scripture*. Klem's study focuses primarily on West Africa, and he concludes the Gospel must be communicated in an oral manner to the 75 % of the world that is not literate.<sup>52</sup> Morgan concurs by stating "Stories of the Bible are the warp through which we weave the stories of our lives. . . . We need to help people know those stories as the beginning of the ongoing love story between God and us, His people."<sup>53</sup> In *Ministry in an Oral Culture: Living with Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, & Minnie Pearl*, Sample goes a step further to press the urgent need of storytelling evangelism:

It is my contention that about half of the people in the United States are people who work primarily out of a traditional orality, by which I mean a people who can read and write--though some cannot--but whose appropriation and engagement with life is oral. More than this, I am convinced that most churches have a clear majority of their membership who work from a traditional orality. When one moves out of the United States into most of the rest of the world, the mass of oral-cultures, both

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<sup>51</sup> H. R. Weber, *The Communication of the Gospel to Illiterates* (London: SCM Press, 1957), 18.

<sup>52</sup> Herbert V. Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scripture* (CA: William Carey Library, 1982), 22.

<sup>53</sup> Peter M. Morgan, *Story Weaving: Using Stories to Transform Your Congregation* (St. Louise: Charlise Press, Oct. 1986), 35.

primary and traditional, looms even larger. Two-thirds of the people in the world are oral.<sup>54</sup>

In response to this urgent need of storytelling evangelism, there seems to be a process of development in CBS in recent decades among the mission fields. Slack and Terry, in their 1999 manual, “Chronological Bible Storying: A Methodology for Presenting the Gospel to Oral Communicators,” mention the missionary work of Trevor McIlwain in the 1970s among a tribal group in the Philippines. McIlwain attempted different approaches to reach the group that had previously converted to Christianity but reverted to their old ways and beliefs. Eventually McIlwain decided to teach the Bible chronologically starting with Genesis. Each session started with a selected biblical story which was followed by expository teaching. This way of storytelling resulted in a much stronger understanding of God’s nature and the Christian faith among the audience and because of this, their lives were transformed.<sup>55</sup>

McIlwain’s approach was also adopted by other missionaries. However, there seems to be some inadequacy in this newly adopted approach. Thus in 1984 Dell and Sue Schultze published *God and Man* to introduce their own set of stories and approach to reach the illiterates for Christ.<sup>56</sup> They are part of the five New Tribes missionaries who began to experiment with McIlwain’s approach. They discovered McIlwain’s approach was too literate. Therefore, they retained the

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<sup>54</sup> Sample, 6.

<sup>55</sup> James B. Slack & J. O. Terry, “Chronological Bible Storying: A Methodology for Presenting the Gospel to Oral Communicators,” (Richmond, Va: International Misson Board of the SBC, March 1999).

<sup>56</sup> Dell G. Schultze & Rachel Sue Schultze, *God and Man* (Manila: Church Strengthening Ministry, 1994).

chronological and biblical focuses, but reduced the amount of expository teaching and emphasized storytelling. They formulated 35 model chronological story lessons with overall teaching instructions and individual lesson suggestions for the teacher. This type of approach is sometimes called Chronological Bible Storytelling because of its nature of narrative presentation. But, it still retained some degrees of expositional teaching in the story and the instruction that followed the story. Apparently, there remained some room to improve in this revised CBS.

By the late 1980s, Slack felt that the current approaches to chronological Bible storytelling were still too literate for oral communicators. Therefore, he developed a slightly different form of chronological Bible presentation that continued to utilize storytelling, but it was followed by dialog. He cautiously avoided the exposition in either the stories or the dialog. This revision achieved some positive result with much better response from the audience. But, he felt that more revisions were needed.

Then, in the 1990s Slack, with the joint effort of Terry, continued to make revisions of this approach while introducing it to Southern Baptist missionaries and national partners in numerous workshops around the world. In 1992 the International Mission Board (IMB) leadership authorized Slack to approach Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for helping in developing and teaching chronological Bible storytelling. In 1994 Slack and Terry were invited to teach the course of chronological Bible storytelling at Southwestern Seminary. Then, in 1994-95 academic years, Southwestern Seminary granted Lovejoy a sabbatical leave

to study this method of Bible teaching. Starting in 1995 Lovejoy joined Slack and Terry in promoting the chronological Bible storytelling workshops.<sup>57</sup>

In 1995 article, “Storying the Storybook to Tribals: A Philippines Perspective of the Chronological Teaching Model,” Steffen reported on a survey he did to evaluate the effectiveness of the Chronological Teaching Method developed by Trevor McIlwain and used by many groups.<sup>58</sup> Then in 2005 he concludes in his book, *Reconnecting God’s Story to Ministry: Cross Cultural Storytelling at Home and Abroad*, by urging missionaries to recover this lost art of storytelling.<sup>59</sup>

The above chronological review of the use of Bible storytelling in mission fields reveals not only the need of this oral strategy, but also the need of constant revisions to fit the target people.

On the other hand, Slack presents a concurrent view regarding Chronological Bible Storying in 2003. He says:

An increasing number of literates, such as Post-Moderns, have turned their backs on the Bible, universal truths, expositional sermons, and deductive Bible studies. But most of these Post-Moderns love stories and listen when stories of any kind are told. They will even listen to Bible stories. Though, as literates, they do not have to have the Gospel in story form to learn, the Bible in story form is about the only way we have found that they will give the Gospel a hearing....many literates, especially highly literate technocrats have grown tired of their literacy. They use their literacy in their work, but after work, they, in a sense, put their literacy aside and go home to television, novels, and especially novels in audio formats, and to videos.

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<sup>57</sup> This chronological historical review is mainly drawn from James B. Slack and J.O. Terry, “Chronological Bible Storying: A Methodology for Presenting the Gospel to Oral Communicators,” (Richmond, Va.: International Mission Board of the SBC, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> Tom A. Steffen, “Storying the Storybook to Tribals: A Philippines Perspective of the Chronological Teaching Model,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12 (April-June 1995), 99-105.

<sup>59</sup> Tom A. Steffen, *Reconnecting God’s Story to Ministry: Cross Cultural Storytelling at Home and Abroad*, (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2005), 25.

They put aside their literacy to enter, after work, into an oral communicator's world.<sup>60</sup>

Thus a narrative, chronological-storytelling means of communicating the Gospel is necessary and very effective to evangelize the unreached. This is not only for oral communicators but also for literates who have a preference for stories in communication.

Since many of the world's cultures are oral and not literate, this requires the learning of oral skills to preach the gospel. As Lenchak points out, "A missionary cannot simply enter a new culture with Bible in hand and expect that people automatically understand the Gospel message. . . . The Bible is a literary work, but we may have to unlearn our literary habits in order to refashion our proclamation of the gospel with oral concepts and methods."<sup>61</sup> Wilson also concurs: "If it is right to communicate the Gospel in the vernacular, and if it is right to use other culturally appropriate means to ensure that the gospel is understood and applied within a society, then it is important to appreciate oral skills and to use the attributes and capabilities of people in an oral culture."<sup>62</sup> This conviction is also supported by Klem: "Reliance on literacy and written materials for evangelism excludes a significant and important segment of the world's population. We must learn to

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<sup>60</sup> Jim Slack, "What Specifically Is Chronological Bible Storying?" (paper presented at Virginia DOM Sessions, Richmond, VA, February 10, 2003).

<sup>61</sup> Timothy Lenchak, "The Bible and Intercultural Communication," *Missiology* 22:4 (October 1994): 457-68.

<sup>62</sup> John D. Wilson, "What It Takes to Reach People in Oral Cultures," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 27:2 (April 1991): 154-158.

adapt to oral styles of presentation, which are not as well received among the scholars and have been overlooked by too many missionaries.”<sup>63</sup>

Former Professor of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Missions, Peter Wagner, tells this story:

Missionaries worked for 25 years with the Tiv tribe in Central Nigeria and saw only 25 baptized believers as a result. Their medium of communication was preaching, which they had learned in Bible school was the way to evangelize. A few years ago some young Tiv Christians set the Gospel story to musical chants, the native medium of communication. Almost immediately the Gospel began to spread like wildfire, and soon a quarter-million Tiv were worshipping Jesus. The Tiv were not as resistant as the missionaries thought. A change in method brought abundant fruit.<sup>64</sup>

In this particular instance the difference is not between written and oral communication but between two different types of oral communication. But the point is obvious. The method or style of communication can have a significant impact on the outcome of that communication. Lovejoy, Slack, Terry and Licio in their 2001 manual “Chronological Bible Storying Manual, Section VII-The Oral Bible,” list several types of oral communication skills. These include many types of storytelling, graphic and plastic arts, singing and chanting, poetry, drama and dance, and genealogies. Some of these oral media are unique to particular groups while others are shared by many groups. Oral people should not be stereotyped in the sort of communication that they can produce, nor are their oral skills limited. However, among these various kinds of oral communication, storytelling is common to most cultures.

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<sup>63</sup> Herbert V. Klem, “The Bible as Oral Literature in Oral Society,” *International Review of Mission* 67:268 (October 1978): 479-86.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1987), 91-92.

Many have reported that chronological Bible storytelling is being widely used in the Asian countries with a growing number of users among an increasingly more diverse listening audience. In the “Chronological Bible Storying Newsletter,” Robert and Donna Burris report their trip to Taiwan in 1998. They were invited by a church in Taichung to participate in a mission trip to the island of Chiau-su located in the chain of the Pescadore Islands. This was to be their second mission trip to the people there. The small island has a total population of about 1,200 people with no known Christians or churches. Taking the Gospel to this particular group presented many challenges. Consequently, they decided to use Bible storytelling. They presented the Bible to the children, youth and adults using story pictures from New Tribes Mission. They had developed a strategic chronological presentation for their four day trip to give a basic understanding of God and man, and they also presented Christ to them. They shared openly in homes and in the streets and the people responded very well. Two adult men received Christ and were baptized.<sup>65</sup>

The art of storytelling among the Asians is also witnessed by missionaries Joyce Moss and George Wilson. They relate that the Ainu of Japan has no written history. They do have a strong oral tradition. Over time, Ainu in different parts of the island came to speak such different dialects that they were unable to communicate, except in an ancient version of the language used for storytelling. Stories are told and retold in Ainu families in this ancient language. These stories recount many floating worlds, with the “Ainu World” resting on the back of a giant

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<sup>65</sup> This information is extracted from “Chronological Bible Storying Newsletter” published by Office of Media Consultant Asia and Pacific 6, no. 4 (January 1994).

fish. The wiggling of the fish explains earthquakes common in this region. There is little evidence that the Ainu of Japan have developed other arts.<sup>66</sup> The same authors also discovered the Bangladesh people as oral people. They say:

Bengali children grow up hearing ancient tales of maharajahs (kings) who are outsmarted by wily jesters, of heroes, kidnapped maidens, and evil demons. Often the stories make a humorous moral point. Both Hindus and Muslims enjoy stories about the many Hindu gods and goddesses.<sup>67</sup>

Since stories never stand in vaccum, thus with this worldview knowledge in mind, the storytelling approach finds its foothold in evangelizing Asian oral peoples. As Terry confirms in the *Chronological Bible Storying Newsletter*, “Chronological Bible Storying has found a useful place in our Baptist missions in Asia. Since learning it from New Tribes missionaries and subsequently sharing with other Baptist missions in Asia, it has now been shared around the world.”<sup>68</sup>

In Africa, Donovan worked among the illiterate Masai for years and he concludes in his 2004 book *Christianity Rediscovered*:

For the illiterate Masai, no other method could better serve our purpose. I would try to convey to them what I knew from the written Gospels and simply ask them to recount afterwards what they remembered of the stories and sayings of Jesus. Even as pagans they sat around at our regular get-togethers, recounting and discussing the stories of Jesus as they had heard them. In the future, if they came to believe in Jesus, they would be able to gather as Christians and do the same thing, each one contributing what he or she knew and remembered about Jesus, and when, as a community, they had finished this, they would have their gospel, their scripture reading, their own liturgy of the Word.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Joyce Moss & George Wilson, *Peoples of the World-Asian and Pacific Islanders* (New York: Gale Research, Inc, 1993), 7.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>68</sup> J.O. Terry, “Bible Storying: Chronological Bible Storying Newsletter,” Office of Media Consultant Asia and Pacific 1, No. 1, (January 1994): 1.

<sup>69</sup> Vincent Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 76-78.

Since Africans are great storytellers, Bill and Pauline Eardensohn have reported in *Commission Magazine* an incredible story of having returned to Tanzania after storying training at Brackenhurst, May, 1991. Bill said in the conclusion: “I felt they should use this cultural strength to the fullest without becoming dependent upon something foreign. I didn’t want to introduce a method that was not easily duplicated by nationals.”<sup>70</sup>

Indeed knowing the culture of the oral people will give insights and criteria for selecting the best avenue for communication. Also, knowing the worldview of the audience will inform the choice of stories and may dictate the need of use or non-use of certain stories. For example, J. O. Terry reports that in one particular Southeast Asian country, there had been an almost futile effort to determine the real worldview issue(s) which could provide an opening for sharing from the Bible the condition and fate of man as a sinner. The ethnic majority of this country are Buddhists in their belief and religious practice and have been significantly resistant to the Gospel. An opening was discovered when one of the persons being interviewed admitted a great fear of death because of the uncertainty of one’s fate beyond the grave. Thus, the stories about death and dying are listed chronologically as they appear in the Bible story, beginning with the core Old Testament stories and leading into the New Testament stories of Jesus.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This is an excerpt from “Bible Storying: Chronological Bible Storying Newsletter,” Office of Media Consultant Asia and Pacific 1, No. 2, (April 1994): 2.

<sup>71</sup> J.O. Terry, “Bible Storying: Chronological Bible Storying Newsletter,” Office of Media Consultant Asia and Pacific 3, No. 2, (January 1993): 2.

The above literature review has demonstrated how some writers are thinking about storytelling evangelism in oral cultures. Missionaries working with oral people in Asia and Africa have used this evangelistic strategy to evangelize unreached peoples successfully. In recent decades, after having a better understanding of their worldview system, chronological Bible storytelling has proved to be an effective evangelistic tool to approach the oral people with the Gospel.

### **Specific Issues of Preparing Storytelling Evangelism among Chinese Minorities**

Knowing the culture and worldview of the Chinese people is the most important pre-evangelistic task. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, there are more than 100 million people from over 450 distinct minorities in China. These minorities are scattered around the country and each maintains its own distinct cultural tradition. Fortunately, there are some common cultural traits and worldview systems among these vast and diverse people groups. In order to effectively evangelize these people, we need to understand these common cultural contexts. As Wan relates in his 1995 book *Missions Within Reach*:

Western culture has a Greco-Roman, politico-legal base and Judeo-Christian ethical foundation. The Greek social system of city-state, the Roman law, etc. have been well developed for “millennia” in the West. The influence of the Judeo-Christian value system and moral code has left its mark in the mind and heart of people in the context of western civilization, so much so that anthropologists who have conducted cross-cultural comparative studies have classified the western culture as a “guilt culture” in contrast to the “shame” culture of the East such as Chinese.<sup>72</sup>

This shame culture of the East is also regarded by Tennent as an important element for consideration in the Gospel preaching. He writes:

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<sup>72</sup> Enoch Wan, *Missions Within Reach: Intercultural Ministries in Canada* (Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1995), 156.

Honor and shame are among the most important values in the ancient Mediterranean world and continue to play a vital role in the formation of human identity in much of North Africa, Middle East, and Asia. A deeper appreciation for how the gospel relates to these values will be increasingly important as the church continues to expand in the context of cultures that are predominantly shame-based.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, the focus of salvation is Christ's shame-bearing death and honor-gaining resurrection, for honor is very desirable and shame is to be shunned at all cost by the Chinese.

On the other hand, Chinese people try hard to avoid confrontation, which would cause someone to lose face and run the risk of breaking relationship. Especially among the minorities, as Chinese Zhuang scholar Liao mentions in his 2002 book, *Zhuang's Nature Worship Culture*, the use of match-making in traditional marriage arrangements, the go-between for business deals, and the guarantee of a reputable person rather than the signing of a legal document, are all time-honored cultural practices. Thus Wan emphasizes in his later book *Banishing the Old and Building the New*, that when we share the Gospel to the Chinese, Jesus Christ should be presented as the mediator, redeemer and reconciler because of this important cultural value of interpersonal relationship. We present Christ as a "go-between" between God and human beings because salvation is best understood by the Chinese in terms of a reconciled vertical relationship with God and a peaceful horizontal relationship with one's fellow man.

Lastly, since the China minorities are oral people, the rationalistic argument, lineal logic, and abstract proclamation of traditional Western theology in evangelism, as Wan labels it, are less appealing to relationally-oriented, co-

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<sup>73</sup> Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 101.

relational thinking, and the pragmatically-inclined Chinese. Instead, Wan puts it this way:

The life-changing reality of Christianity, the Christ-like character of the bearer of the Gospel, and the loving relationship among believers are usually a more powerful expression of Christianity when evangelizing Chinese. Chinese long for the message of power in order to deliver themselves from the threat of fear and fate. To them, the primary message of the Gospel is not a hope to enter heaven “by and by” and deliverance from hell in the afterlife. They want to experience the deliverance from curse, fate, fear, etc. in the “here and now”.<sup>74</sup>

Storytelling evangelism is a personal and relational act that is culturally more relevant and practically more effective than propositional preaching to evangelize China minorities.

### **Conclusion**

The above scholarly work has shed light on storytelling evangelism among oral people. Although there are not many published studies focusing on Chinese minorities per se, the limited sources presented above provide insights that will be incorporated in the development of this project.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 158-160.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT DESIGN

As stated in chapter 1, the project's thesis is: Storytelling evangelism among Chinese oral cultures can be enhanced with training. Accordingly, the project design involves two main parts: the design of a Bible storytelling training course which incorporates the insights from the literature review discussed in chapter 3, and a field test of the training course for evaluation.

To describe the training course and field test of this project in details, I will describe how I designed these training materials, the project setting, the profile of the attending students, the assignments and the duration of the training as well as the outcome evaluation for the training.

#### **Design of the Training Materials**

The main purpose of the training course is to train Chinese minority lay pastors to use Bible storytelling to evangelize their own people. Since most of the Chinese minorities are oral communicators, their communication mainly relies on their personal experience. Anything which is not lived experience cannot be processed by their minds. Also, since the majority of the people are traditional peasants, animism and nature worship are their main religion. Therefore, Chinese minorities are mostly polytheistic worshippers who are similar to ancient Canaanites worshipping gods related to their daily livelihood.<sup>75</sup> Knowing this cultural and religious background, I formulated a culturally receptive and religiously adaptive oral strategy to train the lay pastors for evangelism.

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<sup>75</sup> Johnstone & Mandryk, *Operation World*, 150-155.

For example, these people always attribute their daily livelihood, especially health, sickness and death, to their obedience or disobedience to gods. Therefore, in the choice of the Bible stories, I emphasized the importance of obedience/disobedience that will result in a consequence of life or death. To accomplish this, I started with lead-in questions such as: “Do you always follow the instruction someone gives you?” “What consequences might happen if you disobey?” “What if the consequences were death for disobedience, would that help you to obey?” After asking these, Bible stories with the theme of “death” were told in chronological order to unveil how death results from disobedience. Then I provided in the stories the way of deliverance from these mishaps. I then allowed time for the hearers to talk about the story and to answer any questions they may have.

Another consideration for designing the materials was the use of the language. Due to the minorities’ education level (most of them have only secondary education or below), I had to adapt the official Chinese language to fit their local dialects. This means that trainees had the flexibility to translate training materials written in Mandarin into their target people’s languages.

Therefore, the final design of the training materials included the following three sessions: First, introduce the story as a lead-in; second, tell the story; and third, talk about the story to induce response. The outline of the teaching manuals with a detailed sample story, a total of forty-two death stories translated from Mandarin to English, are given in Appendix A.

## **The Project Setting**

The field test was among the minorities in an autonomous region of Guanxi Province located in southwest of China.<sup>76</sup> The population of this autonomous region is 480,000 representing at least 6 different minorities. Our church, Rutgers Community Christian Church in Somerset, New Jersey, started a theological training program two years ago for a group of 55 lay pastors. This group consisted of Han (the major Chinese group), Zhuang, Miao, Dong, Lisu, and Molau. Since the location of this region is surrounded by the most densely populated minorities in China, this group was considered as a very strategic group in spreading the Gospel among different minorities. Indeed, this group received training during the weekdays and was sent out two by two to the remote regions on weekends for evangelism.

Due to the cultural and religious backgrounds of Chinese minorities as discussed in Chapter 3, traditional evangelistic strategy (propositional presentation) does not seem to work well among these peoples. Therefore, I selected this region for my project setting to train storytelling evangelists.

## **The Profile of the Attending Trainees**

The students who attended the training session were lay pastors selected from four different Chinese minority groups mentioned above: Zhuang, Miao, Lisu and Dong. These minorities scattered throughout southwest China with populations

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<sup>76</sup> This autonomous region is called Rongshui, governed by their own people who have the privilege of making their own policies for education, economy, and social welfare.

of 18,525,600 for the Zhuang,<sup>77</sup> 8,940,116 for the Miao,<sup>78</sup> 715,100 for the Lisu,<sup>79</sup> and 2,960,293 for the Dong people.<sup>80</sup> The total number of attending trainees was 28 with 2 from Lisu, 9 from Zhuang, 15 from Miao and 2 from Dong. Their age ranged from 18 to 55 years old, with an average of 25. Their education ranged from elementary level to high school graduate, and their pastoring experiences ranged from 1 month to 8 years. The detailed profile of the twenty-eight trainees is listed in Appendix D.

Other than the Lisu people who have the highest percentage of Christians (42%) in all China minorities, the other three groups are considered “Least Reached (or unreached) Peoples.”<sup>81</sup>

### **The Assignments and the Duration of Training**

The assignments for the training were to focus on mastering the telling of forty-two Bible stories in sequence.

The duration of training lasted four full days (July 30 to August 2, 2007). A pre-training exercise was also assigned two months before for the students to become familiar with the stories. During the four-day training session, students were divided into ten small groups, two to three persons per group. First I gave one storytelling demonstration to all attendants, then, the students were asked to clarify

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<sup>77</sup> Paul Hattaway, *Operation China: Introducing All the People of China* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001), 15.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>81</sup> This term is adopted from AD2000 and Beyond Movement to indicate a group of people that have less than 2% of adherents to evangelical Christianity.

any possible questions. After ascertaining the understanding of each trainee, I asked each student to tell the stories in their own groups. The students were encouraged to adopt their own styles of presentation and were also given opportunities for group discussion after each storytelling exercise. By the end of each day, all ten groups gathered together to have one representative from each group tell one story to all. Then, I would make a brief comment for each presentation.

Since the trainees were from four different people groups with their own cultural and religious background, each trainee was allowed to have some cultural and religious adaptation in their storytelling. However, to avoid any possible syncretism, the central theme of Jesus' death and resurrection would not be compromised in any way. I also emphasized the importance of insisting on Jesus as the only way of salvation. This is repeatedly reminded by telling the unique story of Jesus' resurrection.

### **The Outcome Evaluation**

An interview and review session was conducted over a period of three days in November 2007 for the same group of lay pastors. Each student was asked to fill out the evaluation form to provide feedback to me. I used their feedback as a source of final evaluation of the project.

The evaluation form consisted of two parts: Storytelling and People's Profile and Outcome of the Storytelling. The first part allowed the trainees to reflect on the target people and the amount of time spent in telling the stories. I asked five questions: How many persons have you told the stories to? How many stories did you tell to each person or persons? How many hours did you spend in telling the

stories? What was (were) the age(s) of the listener(s)? What is the education of the listener(s)?

The second part of the evaluation allowed the students to evaluate the outcome of the project by asking five questions: Were you able to lead any people to the Lord? Did you encounter any resistance during the storytelling? Did you see any difference between the traditional evangelism and storytelling evangelism? Would you be able to pass along the storytelling method to other believer(s)? Would you be willing to continue your evangelism and discipleship using the same method? The evaluation form is given in Appendix B (Translated from Chinese to English).

### **Summary**

To train pastors to evangelize effectively the China minorities, I designed an oral strategy adopting a chronological Bible storytelling method to train a group of diverse minorities lay pastors. A set of 42 stories on the theme of “death” was compiled to let the trainees master the storytelling. After 4 days of intensive training from July 30 to August 2, 2007, each trainee was sent out to practice what they learned on their own people groups. Four months later, I gathered this same group of lay pastors for evaluation and collected their feedback. In Chapter 5, I will present the outcomes of this project and recommendations for future use of this storytelling evangelism.

## CHAPTER 5

### OUTCOMES

After establishing the urgent need for the evangelization of Chinese minority groups, I defined my project thesis as: storytelling evangelism among Chinese oral cultures can be enhanced with training. In Chapter 2, the effect of the storytelling evangelism was confirmed with biblical and theological evidences. A brief literature review in Chapter 3 revealed the effectiveness of storytelling evangelism among oral cultures. In Chapter 4 I devised a course to train a group of Chinese lay pastors on employing the storytelling evangelism technique. The results of the field test have validated this project thesis that storytelling evangelism among Chinese oral cultures can be enhanced with training. I will now present the results. The first part of this chapter is based on the results of the questionnaire each trainee completed during the interview and review session. The second part analyzes and summarizes factors that affected the outcome of the storytelling evangelism. Finally, I present the conclusions and recommendations for future use of this oral strategy.

#### **Evaluation of the Outcome of the Questionnaire**

The questionnaire (Appendix B) is based on two categories of questions, 5 for each category. This questionnaire is the same one used in my pilot project discussed in Chapter 1. Of 28 lay pastors, 22 completed the training. The 6 uncompleted ones had left the training for different reasons.<sup>82</sup> The profile of the 28 lay pastors is given in Appendix D.

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<sup>82</sup> Brother 4 was relocated to other province for new ministry assignment; Sister 7 terminated her ministry due to some family issue; Brother 13 left the team because of some financial conflict; Brother 20 had personal conflict with the team leader and left without resolution; Sister 23 got

In category A of the questionnaire I asked 5 questions to ascertain each trainee was able to tell the stories to as many people with different ages and different education levels. Each trainee was also to spend as much time as possible in telling the stories. Category A questions shows the number of persons who heard the stories (A1) ranges from 5 to 28; the number of stories told (A2) ranges from 2 to 42 (whole series); the number of hours spent in telling the stories (A3) ranges from 20 minutes to 25 hours; the age of the audiences (A4) ranges from 10 to 70 years old and the education level (A5) ranges from illiterate to elementary graduates. The detailed breakdown is listed in Appendix E.

I also expected that trainees were able to lead some of their audiences to the Lord through storytelling, and they might also encounter resistance during the storytelling. I expected the trainees would experience more effective results using storytelling evangelism than traditional evangelism. This difference will encourage the trainees to continue their evangelism using the storytelling method, and to train other believers to do likewise. In category B of the questionnaire (Appendix E), trainees reported the number of people converted to Christ through storytelling (B1) ranges from 0 to 20. Five of the 22 trainees reported resistance during their presentation of the stories (B2). The nature of the resistance varied. For example, Brother 2 encountered one instance of resistance due to family opposition; Sister 10 also encountered family resistance with no specified reason; Sister 15 reported the withdrawal of 2 teenagers after the third story due to their family's animistic beliefs;

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married and moved to another location and Sister 24 was also relocated to other province for new ministry.

Brother 19 had 3 of his 15 audiences refuse to accept the concept of death; and Brother 25 commented that 2 of his 8 audiences were bored by the stories.

As for the comparison between traditional evangelism and storytelling evangelism (B3), all but one trainee reported favor for storytelling evangelism, and agreed that the latter was more acceptable, effective and powerful.

Since the majority of the trainees favored the storytelling evangelism, they were willing to continue the use of this method. They also trained other believers to do the same. According to Category B2, during the process of telling the stories, 7 trainees were able to pass along the storytelling method to others: Brother 1 had opportunities to teach 2 other believers to do the same; Brother 3 had 5; Sister 6 had 2; Sister 9 had 3; Sister 10 had 4; Brother 12 had 1 and Sister 17 had 3. This multiplication of training will certainly enhance the storytelling evangelism among Chinese oral cultures.

In summary, despite resistance from some audiences, all trainees but one expressed their willingness and enthusiasm to continue the use of storytelling evangelism among their own people. They expressed the feasibility and acceptability as well as effectiveness of this oral strategy for evangelism. This evaluation does show that the storytelling evangelism among Chinese oral cultures can be enhanced with training.

### **Analysis and Summary of the Factors Affecting Storytelling Evangelism**

Besides evaluating these questionnaires, I further analyzed the data to determine if other factors may affect the training of the storytelling evangelism among Chinese oral cultures. I categorized the data into 4 factors.

Factor One, the difference of ethnic groups. Since the trainees are from four different minority groups, there remained some potential barriers, such as culture and language, for the training to be effective. The result of this analysis reveals there is no significant difference for the trainees to be effective in their own groups. As the Table 1 indicates below, in the Lisu Group, there is a 72.7% conversion rate for Brother 1 and 2 using the storytelling evangelism in their own people group.

**Table 1: Lisu Group**

	Number of Audiences	Number of Converts	Conversion Ratio
Brother 1	6	4	66.6%
Brother 2	5	4	80.0%
Total	11	8	72.7%

This seems to be a very high conversion rate for evangelism. However, due to the small sample of their target group--6 audiences for Brother 1 and 5 for Brother 2--some may question the validity of this storytelling evangelism for a larger group. This question can be readily answered by the result from the second group as shown in Table 2 below:

**Table 2: Zhuang Group**

	Number of Audiences	Number of Converts	Conversion Ratio
Bother 3	19	6	31.6%
Sister 5	23	18	78.3%
Sister 6	12	9	75.0%
Sister 8	22	9	40.9%
Sister 9	10	7	70.0%
Sister 10	25	20	80.0%
Sister 11	7	5	71.4%
Total	118	74	62.7%

Here the Zhuang are the audiences. There are 118 people listening to 7 trainees telling Bible stories, and 74 of them converted to Christianity from their

ancestors' religion. The conversion rate is 62.7%, still a very impressive result. This high conversion again finds its confirmation in Miao group as listed in Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Miao Group**

	Number of Audiences	Number of Converts	Conversion Ratio
Brother 12	4	2	50.0%
Brother 14	12	6	50.0%
Sister 15	28	20	71.4%
Sister 16	5	5	100%
Sister 17	10	7	70.0%
Sister 18	6	4	66.7%
Brother 19	15	11	73.3%
Sister 21	5	3	60.0%
Sister 22	13	5	38.5%
Brother 25	8	0	0
Brother 26	6	2	33.3%
Total	112	65	58.0%

Here 11 trainees told stories to 112 people and 65 became Christians, a 58% conversion rate. Among these 11 students, Brother 25 did not convert any of his 8 listeners. He told only two stories and did not get any attention from his audiences. The rest of trainees accomplished 33.3% to 100% conversion with their storytelling evangelism. Then, the fourth group as listed in Table 4 shows another high conversion rate, 75%, for 16 Dong audiences listening to 2 trainees.

**Table 4: Dong Group**

	Number of Audiences	Number of Converts	Conversion Ratio
Sister 27	6	2	33.3%
Sister 28	10	10	100.0%
Total	16	12	75.0%

According to the above analysis, the training is effective in helping the lay pastors to evangelize their own peoples using the storytelling approach.

Factor Two, the number of stories told by each trainee. Since there are total 42 stories instructed, the trainees may not be able to tell all of them to each of their audiences. I assumed that if the trainees selected the stories discreetly they could still evangelize their audiences successfully even with only a few stories. Indeed, the outcome of the field test confirms that the number of stories told is not a determining factor for conversion. But, the selection of stories is a determining factor. In Table 5 below, there is a higher conversion rate for Brother 2 who told 42 stories versus 10 told by Brother1.

**Table 5: Lisu Group**

	Number of Stories Told	Conversion Ratio
Brother 1	10	66.6%
Brother 2	42	80.0%

However, when I compare this finding with other groups, it appears that there is no correlation between the number of stories told and the high conversion rate. For example, as shown in Tables 6-8 below, in the Zhuang group, Sister 5 told 42 whole series of stories to 23 people and the conversion is 78.3%. For Sister 11, there are only 6 stories told but the result is high 71.4% conversion rate. This is also true for the Miao group, there is 100% conversion for Sister 16 who told 4 stories as compared to 42 stories told by Sister 17 with 70% conversion. In the Dong group, both Sister 27 and Sister 28 told 6 stories each to their own target people and saw 33.3% and 100% conversion, respectively.

**Table 6: Zhuang Group**

	Number of Stories Told	Conversion Ratio
Bother 3	15	31.6%
Sister 5	42	78.3%
Sister 6	21	75.0%
Sister 8	4	40.9%
Sister 9	10	70.0%
Sister 10	28	80.0%
Sister 11	6	71.4%

**Table 7: Miao Group**

	Number of Stories Told	Conversion Ratio
Brother 12	42	50.0%
Brother 14	5	50.0%
Sister 15	20	71.4%
Sister 16	4	100.0%
Sister 17	42	70.0%
Sister 18	15	66.7%
Brother 19	5	73.3%
Sister 21	4	60.0%
Sister 22	19	38.5%
Brother 25	2	0
Brother 26	4	33.3%

**Table 8: Dong Group**

	Number of Stories Told	Conversion Ratio
Sister 27	6	33.3%
Sister 28	6	100.0%

To sum up, the number of stories told is not a determining factor for conversion. However, there is one thing in common for all the trainees when they told the stories. They always began with story 1, “The Day You Eat of It You Will Die,” then proceeded in chronological order as given in Appendix A. Story 34, “Suffering and Death of Jesus,” is always included in each of their story list. Other than Brother 25 who told 2 stories in total, each trainee also covered story 4 and 39, “God’s Judgment on a Wicked World Brought Death,” and “Raised to Life Again.”

These 4 stories comprise the central theme of the Gospel: rebellion leads to the judgment of death, and Jesus' death brings back life. Despite the fact that some trainees only told as few as 4 stories, they were able to lead as many as 100% of their audiences (Sister 16 in Miao Group) to the Lord.

Factor Three, the age of the audience. As commonly believed, the older the audience, the more difficult for them to convert. However, the outcome of this project disproves that belief. The storytelling evangelism is not hindered by age. In Tables 9-12 below, we can see that majority of the 22 trainees told the stories to age groups ranging from young children to elders. For example, Brother 1 told stories to the group ranging from 13 years old to 68 and Sister 27, 6 to 56 years old. There are three trainees, Sister 11, 16 and 21, who limited their target groups to teenagers. Sister 17 talked to a group of 15 to 23 years old. Another four trainees, Brother 12, Sister 18, Brother 19 and Sister 22, spoke to groups with ages ranging from 20 to 58. Finally, Brother 25 and 26 limited their groups to 40 to 70 years old. Again, the conversion rate is not affected by the age groups. For the teenagers, there is a 60% to 100% conversion rate. The rest groups show ranges of conversion from 31.6% to 100% with majority falling between 50% and 80 %.

**Table 9: Lisu Group**

	Ages	Conversion Ratio
Brother 1	13 to 68	66.6%
Brother 2	15 to 45	80.0%

**Table 10: Zhuang Group**

	Ages	Conversion Ratio
Bother 3	12 to 59	31.6%
Sister 5	10 to 60	78.3%
Sister 6	15 to 55	75.0%
Sister 8	9 to 63	40.9%
Sister 9	13 to 49	70.0%
Sister 10	12 to 68	80.0%
Sister 11	13 to 18	71.4%

**Table 11: Miao Group**

	Ages	Conversion Ratio
Brother 12	25 to 58	50.0%
Brother 14	10 to 40	50.0%
Sister 15	12 to 70	71.4%
Sister 16	13 to 15	100.0%
Sister 17	15 to 23	70.0%
Sister 18	20 to 48	66.7%
Brother 19	20 to 49	73.3%
Sister 21	13 to 16	60.0%
Sister 22	20 to 39	38.5%
Brother 25	45 to 60	0
Brother 26	40 to 70	33.3%

**Table 12: Dong Group**

	Ages	Conversion Ratio
Sister 27	6 to 56	33.3%
Sister 28	7 to 50	100.0%

To sum up, the effectiveness of storytelling evangelism is not limited by the ages of its audiences. It is a very instrumental evangelistic tool for all ages as long as they can understand the stories.

Factor Four, the education levels of the target audiences. Since the Chinese minorities are mostly illiterate or educated only at elementary level, the outcome of the storytelling evangelism may be affected. However, due to the nature of the stories as described in Chapters 2 and 3, I would expect the education level to have

a minimum effect on the project. The results are shown below in Table 13-16. Here we can see that the conversion rates range from 0% to 50% for the illiterate groups. For the elementary graduate groups, the conversion rates are higher, 60% to 100%. Then for the mixed groups (illiterates, graders and elementary graduates), the conversion rates are from 33.3% to 100%. The results show that education levels may have some determining factor for conversion. However, since the majority of the groups are mixed in their education levels, and no detailed breakdown of the groups are available, it is premature to assume the importance of educational level in conversion. But one thing is clear: all trainees, with the exception of one,<sup>83</sup> reported that the storytelling was well received by all audiences despite their education levels.

**Table 13: Lisu Group**

	Education	Conversion Ratio
Brother 1	Elementary Graduates	66.6%
Brother 2	Illiterates and Elementary Graduates	80.0%

**Table 14: Zhuang Group**

	Education	Conversion Ratio
Bother 3	Illiterates, Graders and Elementary Graduates	31.6%
Sister 5	Illiterates, Graders and Elementary Graduates	78.3%
Sister 6	Illiterates and Graders	75.0%
Sister 8	Illiterates and Elementary Graduates	40.9%
Sister 9	Illiterates and Elementary Graduates	70.0%
Sister 10	Illiterates, Grader and Elementary Graduates	80.0%
Sister 11	Elementary Graduates	71.4%

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<sup>83</sup> This trainee, Brother 25, told the stories to 8 illiterates for only 20 minutes and was frustrated by their lack of attention.

**Table 15: Miao Group**

	Education	Conversion Ratio
Brother 12	Illiterates	50.0%
Brother 14	Illiterates, Grader and Elementary Graduates	50.0%
Sister 15	Illiterates and Graders	71.4%
Sister 16	Elementary Graduates	100.0%
Sister 17	Elementary Graduates	70.0%
Sister 18	Illiterates	66.7%
Brother 19	Illiterates and Elementary Graduates	73.3%
Sister 21	Elementary Graduates	60.0%
Sister 22	Illiterates	38.5%
Brother 25	Illiterates	0
Brother 26	Illiterates	33.3%

**Table 16: Dong Group**

	Education	Conversion Ratio
Sister 27	Preschooler, Grader and Elementary Graduates	33.3%
Sister 28	Illiterates, Graders and Elementary Graduates	100.0%

To sum up, further study is needed to determine the influence of education levels in responding to storytelling evangelism. In general, it is safe to assume that storytelling is an effective instrument for evangelizing people groups despite their education levels. The next section of this chapter is the reflection of what I learned from this project.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

I discovered that there is a tremendous need for the storytelling evangelism among Chinese oral cultures. While I was conducting training for the 28 lay pastors from 4 different minorities, there was one pastor, who had been ministering among the nearby villages for many years without much success, asking to be present in the training. At the end of the training, this pastor was very amazed to see that Gospel can be presented in such a winsome way so that even illiterate people can

understand it. For the next 3 months, he evangelized to his villages using the Bible storytelling method. He related in our subsequent evaluation session that there is a breakthrough in the villages where he told the stories. People, young or old, started to come to him for more stories. Not only he was able to tell them the entire series of 42 stories, he was asked to repeat the same stories to them from time to time.

I also learned that the education level of each trainee affects how they present the Gospel stories. As shown in Appendix D, Profile of the Lay Pastors, the education levels of the trainees range from elementary to high school graduates. I noted that the students with higher education were able to learn the storytelling method faster and present more naturally. However, given enough time, less-educated students would catch up and do the same. Thus, patience with the trainees is a key for successful training.

Another lesson I learned is that a good knowledge of the Bible is essential for the students to employ effectively the Bible storytelling method. Among the 28 trainees, there are 2 who were new believers (about 1 year). Their learning of the storytelling was limited by their knowledge of the Bible. So, it is a plus for trainees to be familiar with the Bible before they can start learning this method.

As for the training course, all trainees reflected that the numbers of stories can be reduced as long as key stories such as 1, 2, 4, 27, 34, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42; are included.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the training can be more efficient and it will certainly make the reproduction of the storytelling method more applicable and appealing. With this recommendation in mind and the lessons mentioned above, I believe the

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<sup>84</sup> These stories are outlined in Appendix A.

training curriculum designed in this project can be used to train other Chinese minority lay pastors to use storytelling evangelism among their own peoples.

This thesis suggests that there is an urgency to evangelize the least reached peoples in China. The vast majority of them are ancestor worshippers and animists. Since they are relational people, storytelling is the most suitable vehicle for communicating information. This project has laid a foundation for those who plan evangelism among Chinese minorities. The fruitful result of the study should also encourage those lay pastors who have ministered among their own peoples without much success. By training more lay pastors in different minority groups using storytelling evangelism, we should be able to win more souls for our Lord.

## APPENDIX A

### OUTLINE OF THE DEATH STORIES FROM THE BIBLE

- A. There are forty stories learned and presented by the students
  - 1. The Day You Eat Of It You Will Die
  - 2. Death Comes to the First Family
  - 3. The Righteous Man Who Was Taken Away
  - 4. God's Judgment on a Wicked World Brought Death
  - 5. Death in a Righteous Man's Family
  - 6. Death of Lot's Wife
  - 7. Death of Sarah
  - 8. Death of Abraham
  - 9. Death of Beloved Rachel
  - 10. Death of Jacob
  - 11. Death of Joseph
  - 12. Deaths of the Egyptian Firstborn
  - 13. Deaths of Disrespectful Worshippers
  - 14. Deaths of Korah and His Followers
  - 15. Deaths of Moses, Miriam and Aaron
  - 16. Disaster for Achan's Family
  - 17. Death of Joshua
  - 18. Death of Sampson
  - 19. Death of Naomi's Sons
  - 20. Deaths of King Saul and Son Jonathan
  - 21. Death of Bathsheba's Husband
  - 22. Deaths of David's Four Sons
  - 23. Death of Jereboam's Son
  - 24. Tragic Death of Naboth
  - 25. Life for the Zarephath Widow's Dead Son
  - 26. Death of the Shunammite Woman's Son
  - 27. The Soul That Sins, It Will Die

28. Suffering and Death of the Righteous One
29. Death of John the Baptist
30. The Woman Good as Dead & Jairus' Daughter
31. The Widow of Nain's Dead Son
32. Death of a Foolish Man
33. Death of Lazarus the Brother
34. Death of the Rich Man and Beggar Lazarus
35. Suffering and Death of Jesus
36. Death of Stephen
37. Deaths of Ananias and Sapphira
38. To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain
39. Raised to Life Again
40. The Coming Judgment of Sinners
41. No More Death
42. It's Your Choice

B. A sample of the story

**"The Day You Eat Of It You Will Die"**

**Scripture Base: Genesis 1:1~3:21**

**Content:**

**Introduce the story**

1. Do you always follow the instructions someone gives you?
2. What consequences might happen if you disobey?
3. What if the consequences were death for disobedience? Would that help you to obey?
4. Have you given instructions to another person and told them of the consequences for disobedience?
5. Here is a story that tells of just such instruction (or command) that was given to the very first man and woman. Find out what happened to them and how their actions affect us today.

### **Tell the story**

In the beginning there was only life. God created all the plants and trees and gave them the ability to reproduce after their kind. God created the birds of the air and the fish and all the creatures that swim in the sea. God also blessed them. Then God created all the living creatures on the land-the livestock and wild animals and all creatures that move about on the land. God gave them life and saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image and likeness.” So God created first man from the dust of the earth and breathe into him the breath of life. And man became a living soul. Then God made woman from man’s flesh and bone. And God saw that all his work was very good.

In that day was harmony and peace for man lived with all of God’s creation and there was no death.

God prepared a garden with trees for the man He made and put him there to tend it. In the middle of the garden there were the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God said to the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For when you eat of it you will surely die.”

Sometime later the serpent tempted the woman by saying, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman replied, “God did say, ‘You must not eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

The serpent said, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

So the woman continued to gaze upon the fruit and saw its beauty, and it was tasty, and that it was desirable for gaining wisdom, so she took some and ate it and gave some to her husband who was there with her, and he ate also.

God came to judge their disobedience. He began with the serpent. A time will come when the serpent’s head would be crushed by a descendant

of the woman. The serpent's life or work would be finished by this descendant of woman. The woman would endure pain in childbirth and would desire her husband who would rule over her. For the man the ground would now be cursed requiring painful toil to grow his food. And one day his life would end and he would return to the dust from which he was made.

Because the man and woman were ashamed of their nakedness after their eyes were opened, God made garments of animal skins and so clothed the man and woman. Blood of the innocent animals was shed to cover the sin and shame of the man and woman. Death had come to the animals.

Because of their disobedience the man and woman were put out of the garden God had prepared for them and cut off from the tree of life by which they could eat and live forever.

The man Adam lived a long time and had many sons and daughters. When Adam was 930 years old he died just as God said would happen. But in another way man had died long before that when his first living relationship with his Creator died. For the man disobeyed his God who had given life to everything. Death had come into the world by the first man. And today we have inherited the consequences of that disobedience. By disobedience death had come into the world.

### **Talk About the Story**

1. Have you ever heard this story before? What did you learn from it?
2. In the beginning was there death?
3. What command did God give the man? What was the consequence for disobedience?
4. What did the serpent say would NOT happen if the woman ate the fruit?
5. Did the woman know what God had said would happen if she ate the fruit?
6. Did the man and woman die right then?
7. What did God say would one day happen to the man?
8. Did it happen as God said?
9. If you had been that first man or woman, would you have obeyed God?

10. If you knew about other commands that God has given, would you obey them?

11. In future stories we will learn of these commands and promises from God's written Word and how they lead to life, even if we die.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

- A. Storytelling and people's profile**
  1. How many persons have you told the stories to?
  2. How many stories did you tell to each person or persons?
  3. How many hours did you spend in telling the stories?
  4. What was (were) the age(s) of the listener(s)?
  5. What is the education of the listeners(s)?
  
- B. Outcome of the storytelling**
  1. Were you able to lead any people to the Lord through storytelling? If yes, how many?
  2. Did you encounter any resistance during the storytelling? If yes, please specify.
  3. Did you see any difference between the traditional evangelism and storytelling evangelism? If yes, please specify.
  4. Would you be able to pass along the storytelling method to other believer(s)? If yes, how many?
  5. Would you be willing to continue your evangelism and discipleship using the same method?

## APPENDIX C

### SUMMARY OF THE OUTCOME OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name	A. Storytelling and People's profile		B. Outcomes of the Storytelling	
Brother V	1	10 (audiences)	1	yes, 6 (converts)
	2	whole series (42 in total) (number of stories told)	2	no (resistance of audience)
	3	20 hours on the average (hours spent in telling the stories)	3	yes, storytelling is more acceptable and effective (difference between traditional evangelism and storytelling evangelism)
	4	10 to 60 years old (ages of the audiences)	4	yes, two (pass along the storytelling method to others)
	5	Illiterate (education levels of audiences)	5	yes (willingness to continue the use of storytelling evangelism)
Brother W	1	5	1	yes, two
	2	whole series	2	yes, storytelling is more effective
	3	15 to 25 hours	3	yes, one due to the animism worship of the family
	4	9 to 43 years old	4	yes, 2
	5	two illiterates, three elementary graduates	5	yes
Brother X	1	7	1	yes, four
	2	whole series	2	yes, due to ancestor worship, but all persisted anyway
	3	20 hours	3	yes, storytelling is more convincing
	4	13 to 33 years old	4	yes, two
	5	elementary(grade 3 to 5)	5	yes

Brother Y	1	15	1	yes, 6
	2	whole series	2	yes, one elderly was very resistant due to his animism worship
	3	15 to 20 hours	3	yes, storytelling is more effective
	4	35 to 60 years old	4	yes, 3
	5	illiterate except one elementary	5	yes
Brother Z	1	6	1	yes, 2
	2	Whole series	2	not really
	3	20 to 25 hours	3	yes, storytelling is more pleasant and acceptable
	4	25 to 65 years old	4	yes, 2
	5	two elementary, one grade 3, three illiterates	5	yes

## APPENDIX D

### PROFILE OF THE LAY PASTORS

The twenty-eight lay pastors involved in this project will remain anonymous to protect their identity. Number 1, 2...28 will be used to designate each of them.

Name	Age	Ethnic Group	Gender	Education	Years of Being Christian
1	21	Lisu	M	Middle School	3
2	24	Lisu	M	Elementary	2
3	25	Zhuang	M	Middle School	3
4	52	Zhuang	M	High School	20
5	19	Zhuang	F	Middle School	1.5
6	32	Zhuang	F	Middle School	13
7	36	Zhuang	F	High School	2
8	23	Zhuang	F	Middle School	5
9	55	Zhuang	F	Middle School	10
10	18	Zhuang	F	Middle School	3
11	29	Zhuang	F	Middle School	10
12	19	Miao	M	Elementary	3
13	23	Miao	M	Elementary	3
14	20	Miao	M	Middle School	4
15	19	Miao	F	Middle School	1
16	18	Miao	F	Elementary	4
17	20	Miao	F	Elementary	3
18	21	Miao	F	Middle School	1
19	22	Miao	M	Middle School	10
20	20	Miao	M	Elementary	3
21	23	Miao	F	Elementary	2
22	21	Miao	F	Middle School	6
23	22	Miao	F	Middle School	3
24	19	Miao	F	Middle School	4

25	22	Miao	M	Elementary	15
26	25	Miao	M	Elementary	25
27	28	Dong	F	Elementary	8
28	20	Dong	F	High School	12

## APPENDIX E

### SUMMARY OF THE OUTCOME OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name	A. Storytelling and People's Profile		B. Outcomes of the Storytelling	
Brother 1	1	6 (audiences)	1	4 (converts)
	2	10 (number of stories told)	2	no (resistance of audience)
	3	2 hours on the average (hours spent in telling the stories)	3	yes, storytelling is more acceptable and effective (difference between traditional evangelism and storytelling evangelism)
	4	13 to 68 years old (ages of the audiences)	4	yes, 2 (pass along the storytelling method to others)
	5	all are elementary graduates (education levels of audiences)	5	yes (willingness to continue the use of storytelling evangelism)
Brother 2	1	5	1	4
	2	whole series (42 in total)	2	yes, 1 had to stop due to family's opposition
	3	20 hours on the average	3	yes, storytelling is more effective
	4	15 to 45 years old	4	no
	5	2 are illiterates, three are elementary graduates	5	yes, absolutely
Brother 3	1	10	1	6
	2	15	2	no
	3	4 hours	3	yes, storytelling is more appealing
	4	12 to 59 years old	4	yes, 5
	5	5 are illiterates, 2 are elementary graduates and 3 are grade 3	5	yes
Sister 5	1	23	1	18
	2	whole series	2	no
	3	25 hours	3	yes, storytelling is more acceptable and effective
	4	10 to 60 years old	4	no, but many invited friends to come
	5	10 are illiterates, 4 are elementary graduates and 9 are from grade 3 to 5	5	yes

Sister 6	1	12	1	9
	2	21	2	no
	3	8 hours	3	yes, storytelling is more effective
	4	15 to 55 years old	4	yes, 2
	5	5 are illiterates, 7 are from grade 4 to graduate	5	yes
Sister 8	1	22	1	9
	2	4	2	no
	3	45 minutes	3	yes, storytelling is much more appealing
	4	9 to 63 years old	4	no, but I told them to bring friends
	5	5 are illiterates, the rest are elementary graduates	5	yes
Sister 9	1	10	1	7
	2	10	2	no
	3	2 hours	3	Yes, storytelling is more acceptable and understandable
	4	13 to 49 years old	4	yes, 3
	5	7 are illiterates, 3 are elementary graduates	5	yes, definitely
Sister 10	1	25	1	20
	2	28	2	yes, 1 youth was prevented by family from coming after first session
	3	6 hours	3	yes, storytelling is much more powerful
	4	12 to 68 years old	4	yes, 4
	5	20 are illiterates, 4 are elementary graduates and 1 is 4 <sup>th</sup> grader	5	yes, no doubt at about it
Sister 11	1	7	1	5
	2	6	2	no
	3	2 hours	3	yes, storytelling is much better understood and I enjoy myself too
	4	13 to 18 years old	4	no
	5	all are elementary graduates	5	yes
Brother 12	1	4	1	2
	2	whole series	2	no
	3	15 hours	3	yes, storytelling is more fun
	4	25 to 58 years old	4	yes, 1
	5	all are illiterates	5	yes

Brother 14	1	12	1	6
	2	5	2	no
	3	2 hours	3	yes, storytelling can get more attention
	4	10 to 40 years old	4	no
	5	5 are illiterates, one is 3 <sup>rd</sup> grader and the rest are elementary graduates	5	yes, I will try to tell all stories to more people
Sister 15	1	28	1	20
	2	20	2	yes, 2 teenagers have to leave after 3 <sup>rd</sup> stories due to animism
	3	5 hours	3	yes, storytelling is more powerful
	4	12 to 70 years old	4	no
	5	2 are graders, the rest are illiterates	5	yes, absolutely
Sister 16	1	5	1	5
	2	4	2	no
	3	50 minutes	3	yes, storytelling can get more attention
	4	13 to 15 years old	4	no
	5	all are elementary graduates	5	yes
Sister 17	1	10	1	7
	2	whole series	2	no
	3	25 hours	3	yes, storytelling is more thorough to introduce the Gospel and easier to be accepted
	4	15 to 23 years old	4	yes, 3
	5	all are elementary graduates	5	yes
Sister 18	1	6	1	4
	2	15	2	no
	3	3 hours	3	yes, storytelling is more attractive
	4	20 to 48 years old	4	no
	5	all are illiterates	5	yes
Brother 19	1	15	1	11
	2	5	2	yes, 3 left due to rejection to death
	3	2.5 hours	3	yes, storytelling is more convicting
	4	20 to 49 years old	4	no
	5	10 are elementary graduates, 5 are illiterates	5	yes

Sister 21	1	5	1	3
	2	4	2	no
	3	1 hour	3	yes, storytelling is easier to get attention
	4	13 to 16 years old	4	no
	5	all are elementary graduates	5	yes, I need to tell more stories to more people especially older ones
Sister 22	1	13	1	5
	2	19	2	no
	3	4 hours	3	yes, storytelling is not offensive to the hearers
	4	20 to 39 years old	4	no
	5	all are illiterates	5	yes, I need to tell the whole series
Brother 25	1	8	1	0
	2	2	2	yes, they are bored
	3	20 minutes	3	not sure
	4	45 to 60 years old	4	no
	5	all are illiterates	5	yes, I am frustrated but will keep trying to be more skillful in telling the stories and tell more
Brother 26	1	6	1	2
	2	4	2	no
	3	1 hour	3	yes, storytelling is more acceptable
	4	40 to 70 years old	4	no
	5	all are illiterates	5	yes, I will tell more stories to the same group and hope the rest will also believe soon
Sister 27	1	6	1	2
	2	6	2	yes, I did not have enough time to tell more stories
	3	2 hours	3	yes, storytelling is a very powerful tool in evangelism, but need more practices
	4	6 to 56 years old	4	no
	5	1 is preschooler, 1 is 3 <sup>rd</sup> grader, the rest are elementary graduates	5	absolutely

Sister 28	1	10	1	10
	2	6	2	no
	3	1.5 hours	3	yes, storytelling can get more attention and easier to be accepted
	4	7 to 50 years old	4	no
	5	2 are graders, 2 are elementary graduates, the rest are illiterates	5	yes, I will tell more stories to more people with different ages

**APPENDIX F**  
**ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY OF TRAINEES' FEEDBACK**  
**ACCORDING TO MINORITY GROUPS**

**Table 1: Lisu Group**

	Number of Audiences	Number of Converts	Conversion Ratio
Brother 1	6	4	66.6%
Brother 2	5	4	80.0%
Total	11	8	72.7%

**Table 2: Zhuang Group**

	Number of Audiences	Number of Converts	Conversion Ratio
Bother 3	19	6	31.6%
Sister 5	23	18	78.3%
Sister 6	12	9	75.0%
Sister 8	22	9	40.9%
Sister 9	10	7	70.0%
Sister 10	25	20	80.0%
Sister 11	7	5	71.4%
Total	118	74	62.7%

**Table 3: Miao Group**

	Number of Audiences	Number of Converts	Conversion Ratio
Brother 12	4	2	50.0%
Brother 14	12	6	50.0%
Sister 15	28	20	71.4%
Sister 16	5	5	100%
Sister 17	10	7	70.0%
Sister 18	6	4	66.7%
Brother 19	15	11	73.3%
Sister 21	5	3	60.0%
Sister 22	13	5	38.5%
Brother 25	8	0	0
Brother 26	6	2	33.3%
Total	112	65	58.0%

**Table 4: Dong Group**

	Number of Audiences	Number of Converts	Conversion Ratio
Sister 27	6	2	33.3%
Sister 28	10	10	100%
Total	16	12	75.0%

## APPENDIX G

### ANALYSIS OF NUMBER OF STORIES TOLD AND CONVERSION RATIO

**Table 5: Lisu Group**

	Number of Stories Told	Conversion Ratio
Brother 1	10	66.6%
Brother 2	42	80.0%

**Table 6: Zhuang Group**

	Number of Stories Told	Conversion Ratio
Bother 3	15	31.6%
Sister 5	42	78.3%
Sister 6	21	75.0%
Sister 8	4	40.9%
Sister 9	10	70.0%
Sister 10	28	80.0%
Sister 11	6	71.4%

**Table 7: Miao Group**

	Number of Stories Told	Conversion Ratio
Brother 12	42	50.0%
Brother 14	5	50.0%
Sister 15	20	71.4%
Sister 16	4	100.0%
Sister 17	42	70.0%
Sister 18	15	66.7%
Brother 19	5	73.3%
Sister 21	4	60.0%
Sister 22	19	38.5%
Brother 25	2	0
Brother 26	4	33.3%

**Table 8: Dong Group**

	Number of Stories Told	Conversion Ratio
Sister 27	6	33.3%
Sister 28	6	100.0%

## APPENDIX H

### ANALYSIS OF AGES OF AUDIENCES AND CONVERSION RATIO

**Table 9: Lisu Group**

	Ages	Conversion Ratio
Brother 1	13 to 68	66.6%
Brother 2	15 to 45	80.0%

**Table 10: Zhuang Group**

	Ages	Conversion Ratio
Bother 3	12 to 59	31.6%
Sister 5	10 to 60	78.3%
Sister 6	15 to 55	75.0%
Sister 8	9 to 63	40.9%
Sister 9	13 to 49	70.0%
Sister 10	12 to 68	80.0%
Sister 11	13 to 18	71.4%

**Table 11: Miao Group**

	Ages	Conversion Ratio
Brother 12	25 to 58	50.0%
Brother 14	10 to 40	50.0%
Sister 15	12 to 70	71.4%
Sister 16	13 to 15	100.0%
Sister 17	15 to 23	70.0%
Sister 18	20 to 48	66.7%
Brother 19	20 to 49	73.3%
Sister 21	13 to 16	60.0%
Sister 22	20 to 39	38.5%
Brother 25	45 to 60	0
Brother 26	40 to 70	33.3%

**Table 12: Dong Group**

	Ages	Conversion Ratio
Sister 27	6 to 56	33.3%
Sister 28	7 to 50	100.0%

## APPENDIX I

### ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION LEVEL AND CONVERSION RATIO

**Table 13: Lisu Group**

	Education	Conversion Ratio
Brother 1	Elementary Graduates	66.6%
Brother 2	Illiterates and Elementary Graduates	80.0%

**Table 14: Zhuang Group**

	Education	Conversion Ratio
Bother 3	Illiterates, Graders and Elementary Graduates	31.6%
Sister 5	Illiterates, Graders and Elementary Graduates	78.3%
Sister 6	Illiterates and Graders	75.0%
Sister 8	Illiterates and Elementary Graduates	40.9%
Sister 9	Illiterates and Elementary Graduates	70.0%
Sister 10	Illiterates, Grader and Elementary Graduates	80.0%
Sister 11	Elementary Graduates	71.4%

**Table 15: Miao Group**

	Education	Conversion Ratio
Brother 12	Illiterates	50.0%
Brother 14	Illiterates, Grader and Elementary Graduates	50.0%
Sister 15	Illiterates and Graders	71.4%
Sister 16	Elementary Graduates	100.0%
Sister 17	Elementary Graduates	70.0%
Sister 18	Illiterates	66.7%
Brother 19	Illiterates and Elementary Graduates	73.3%
Sister 21	Elementary Graduates	60.0%
Sister 22	Illiterates	38.5%
Brother 25	Illiterates	0
Brother 26	Illiterates	33.3%

**Table 16: Dong Group**

	Education	Conversion Ratio
Sister 27	Preschooler, Grader and Elementary Graduates	33.3%
Sister 28	Illiterates, Graders and Elementary Graduates	100.0%

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## **VITA**

The author of this thesis is Steve Chen, born March 19, 1952 in Taipei, Taiwan. He graduated from National Taiwan University in 1976 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Therapy. In 1977, he came to the United States of America for his graduate study at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, Virginia. After receiving his Master degree in Physical Therapy in 1980, Steve moved to New Jersey to start his physical therapy practice. In 1981, he married Tina Chen and began to attend a local Chinese church as a seeker in Pine Brook, New Jersey.

In March, 1984, Steve was baptized at Rutgers Community Christian Church in New Brunswick, New Jersey. He then started to serve in the church in different ministries. In 1993, when Steve was a private physical therapy practitioner, he sensed God's call to be equipped in seminary. He then enrolled in Biblical Theological Seminary and received his M.Div. in 1998. Immediately, Steve left his profession as a physical therapist and became a minister at Rutgers Community Christian Church. In January 2001, Steve was ordained and is now the Mission Pastor there. His passion is to plant churches among the least reached peoples in China. He expects to receive his Doctor of Ministry degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in May 2008.

Steve and Tina have two children, Andrew and Brian. They now live in Warren, New Jersey.